DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 104 877 SP 009 118

AUTHOR Cherry, Clare
TITLE What Moves Me to Act? II.
INSTITUTION American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Washington, D.C. National Association for Sport and Physical Education.
PUB DATE Aug 71
NOTE 6p.; Presented at the Perceptual Motor Conference, Sparks Nugget Convention Center (Sparks, Nevada, August 26-28, 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Motion; *Perceptual Motor Learning; Preschool Children; Reading Achievement

ABSTRACT

This speaker contends that many learning problems can be prevented, or at least lessened, by early intervention. This knowledge is what moves her to act. She describes how, while tutoring bright but nonachieving children in reading, she realized that it was the opportunities she provided the children for visual-motor perceptual training that were improving their reading ability. Later, she gave preschool children the same types of movement experiences she had given the older children she had tutored. Interest centers, tables, sinks, etc. in her classroom were not arranged for ease of movement and convenience of use, but rather for maximum challenge of body and mind. Although children in this program represented a cross-section of the community, 75 percent of the graduates were usually selected by their elementary schools for programs for the gifted. (PB)

ED104877

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"What Moves Me To Act?" II.

Speaker: Clare Cherry

WHAT MOVES ME TO ACT? So many things:

I am concerned over the fantastic amount of effort that we need to spend discussing the remediation of learning problems which are the result of perceptual inadequacies of a developmental nature.

I am concerned over the untoward pressures to which so many children with these problems are subjected in trying to force them to "hurry up, try harder, you can do it, catch up with your classmates."

I am concerned over the simple developmental problems which may or may not someday be overcome, but which are in the meantime so compounded and exaggerated that they take on the greater burden of emotional distress and personality changes, adding to this nation's ever-darkening picture of poor mental health.

I think of these things and I worry. I worry about the countless numbers of preschool children who, because their rate of development lags behind that of the majority in one area or another because of physical, physiological, psychological, or environmental reasons, will soon become part of our vast educational machine and it will label him SLOW. And--sadly--it will teach him well to live up to that label.

WHAT MOVES ME TO ACT? The knowledge that so many of the learning problems which we cope with today can be prevented, or at least lessened, by very early intervention and concern.

...Too many programs for young children merely try to fill the child with facts and concepts that he frequently cannot assimilate because of disinterest, cultural differences, immaturity or perception and/or sensorimotor inadequacies.

Too many teachers become so concerned with how the child will do in kindergarten, or the first grade, or the second--how he will perform on the tests--how he will meet with over-all learning objectives that they unwittingly lose sight of how the child is doing, what the child needs, right NOW. And WHY. By now, I don't mean next week, tomorrow, or this afternoon. I mean right now, this minute! If more emphasis were put on the now and the why, tomorrow will become a better today.

Universal pre-school programs need to be developed which will emphasize perceptual and sensory acuity and the accompanying emotional well-being and self-esteem for all children and not just those who are economically deprived, culturally different, or are found through sporadic screening to have a special need.

We as a nation need to get back to the recognition of the fact that every child needs time and space to grow--time and space to be a child--time and space for self-discovery.

Whether or not a pre-school child should be taught to read is unimportant to me. What is important is the fact that we have built an entire culture on the hypothesis that the only reason for even having a child is so that he can be taught to read!

SP009 118

Surely there is more to living, surely there is more to growing, surely there is more to loving than this.

Do we honestly accept each child for his own worth and seek to help him become the most of the kind of person he can become. Or, do we unrealistically give guidance in order that each child can be the best, when we know full well only one person can be the best.

I know, because I went that route, too.

Three months before my son was to go into the third grade at age 7½, he still had not learned to read. And so I had him tested. And tested again. I was told he had a very high I.Q. and the ability for instant memory. I was also told he had a three-year-old vocabulary and a 3-year-old's level of small muscle development and eye-hand coordination.

Drawing on these facts, I spent the next seven days teaching him four letters. I showed him how to write them, to recognize their shapes by touch and by feel, to find them in the paper and magazines. Finally, I showed him that if he put the four letter in a certain order, they made the word, "Dick." "Oh," he said. "That's how you make a word. Show me more."

Within two months he was the top reader in his class.

WHAT MOVES ME TO ACT? This question:

Why did my son have to wait until he was almost eight years old to find out that he was just as good as everyone else in his class.

Why did he have to wait until it was almost too late to completely overcome the tremendous burden of continuous failure, the fear of non-importance, and the unforgettable trauma of daily public embarrassment in the classroom?

And, as I asked myself why and tried so hard to assuage my own feelings of guilt, I began to tutor other bright but non-achieving boys and girls, many of whom had similar dramatic successes in one way or another. I naively attributed much of their success to my attitude and ability for making it fun. I included art lessons along with the tutoring, just for fun. To make the lessons last longer with the least amount of supervision, I usually gave the child large mosiacs to work, telling him to place the small gravel stones one by one as real artists do. If a child came and didn't want to read, that was okay, too. I would just win his cooperation with the art lessons. To my amazement, such a child seemed to progress just as fast with his reading as did those who went my whole clever route.

Puzzled, I enrolled in a course on Sensory and Perceptual Development and Reading Disabilities. I must confess that most of my time was spent in trying to differentiate between such terms as perceptual development, visual-motor, sensorimotor, cognition...and all the other related phrases. But one night, while driving home from class, I suddenly saw a vision of all the children--my tutoring children--all sitting and making mosiacs; placing the stones one by one. Looking and selecting. Reaching and placing. Searching and picking. Over and over and over again. And, I'm just as excited now telling you about it as I was in that first moment of awareness. Awareness that I was giving

these children opportunities for visual-motor perceptual training and that is why they were learning to read.

And my mind went back to the dramatic success I had with my own son and realized that it was possibly because we sat for twenty minutes, twice a day, with thirty or forty cut-out letters of all sizes, thicknesses, and colors, spread on the floor. We played games with me saying, "Give me the "K" (only the sound, not the name of the letter), give me the "I" and so on...more visual-perceptual training, as he searched out, picked up, and handed me the letters. If he made an error, he was not corrected. Apparently it was the movement that was important.

With that realization, my studies progressed swiftly and my work took on new aspects. My tutoring expanded to include music, movement, dramatics, pantomine...all kinds of creative activities because I observed that when I gave the child true creative freedom (not permission--but freedom), he moved MORE, and he moved MORE EASILY. Boys and girls began to crawl and creep and roll and hop and jump. They climbed, exercised, made large mosaics, painted, pantomined to records...and learned the sounds of the letters. AND WITHOUT OPENING A BOOK, SLOW READERS BECAME FASTER READERS. NON-READERS COULD TAKE DICTATION OF LETTERS AND READ BACK THE WORD THAT HAD BEEN DICTATED.

All of this tutoring work was done in my spare time--on Saturdays and during the summer vacation months, primarily because I was deeply involved in my regular job, which was the development of a half-day experimental nursery and kindergarten program.

One day, while dancing and singing with my nursery school students, playing some traditional rhythmic games, I once again had an experience of sudden awareness and new understanding: I realized that I was almost giving these pre-school children the same kinds of movement experiences that I gave my non-reading 6 to 9 year olds!

Then the excitement really started! If these movement games helped to remediate some learning problems...if these movement experiences helped older children to develop in areas of perception and sensory awareness in which their growth had lagged, why not give the same experiences to pre-school children and perhaps help their developmental growth at a young enough age to prevent many learning problems from developing in the first place, or to minimize those that could not be prevented.

The key to dynamic living is the readiness to put aside your traditional, pre-planned, secondhand curriculum. Find out how the child feels right now. Taking your cues from these feelings and your clues from what he needs, chart a new course and come into the child from a new direction. Get off the damned freeway and onto the hidden mountain trails. They will get you to your same goal, but they will do so more meaningfully. And, you will discover that you can really consider yourself a <u>teacher</u> in the most significant interpretation of the word.

And so, we turned the apple cart upside down in the nursery school. We are now in the seventh year of our <u>creative movement</u> program. The book which I subsequently wrote about our sensorimotor, perceptual-development, rhythmic movement activities (CREATIVE MOVEMENT FOR THE DEVELOPING CHILD: A HANDBOOK FOR NON-MUSICIANS, LSI/Fearon Publ., Belmont, California, Rev. ed. 1971) is widely used in kindergarten, nursery schools, and nursery-education training classes. We have

further expanded into a program of developmental art. This, too, is geared to the maximum perceptual and sensory acuity of the young child.

I'm so proud of our school, I don't know where to begin telling you about it. Movement is not an isolated happening for twenty or thirty minutes of programmed activity. The entire school has become a setting for a continuous and beautiful ballet in which two-and three-year-olds, four-and five-year-olds, all are given every opportunity to use their own natural bodily movements as freely as they wish and to use their own inherent creative abilities in the self-direction of their own experiences, and the liberal expression of their own feelings and emotions. Furniture is kept at a minimum. Tables are constantly re-arranged so that the child can't approach them by rote. They are frequently placed away from the shelves in order to encourage yet more movement and more awareness of space and distance. Our playground is half a block away from the classroom. To get there, the child has to go down a long patio walk, up about twelve steps, work his way through the bicycle-riding playground, cross a parking lot, go up ten more steps, along another walk, down a ramp...and finally he has arrived. He goes back and forth between classroom and playground, freely, and at will. He goes through a crawl box two or three times daily. He spends ten to fifteen minutes a day in other crawling, squirming, wriggling, and creeping activities. These are usually in the nature of games based on the kinds of things small children are interested in, and usually to the rhythmic accompaniment of a tambourine beat. He hops, jumps, spins, twirls, tiptoes, stretches, reaches, rocks, shakes, wiggles. He moves fast, slow, loud, soft. He climbs over and under and above and below. He slides backwards and frontwards and sideways. He is helped to go through all of the movements which a child learns to do naturally during the course of normal, unhindered growth. He is encouraged to use all of the movements which we observe are natural to the child when he is left alone to play freely and unencumbered by things and rules and people. Sometimes he grows like a flower; may run like the wind, or pop like corn. Sometimes he may just fly like a bird (whose feet you cannot even hear). But always, all days, the common denominator is movement.

Schedules, learning circles, organized conversational and language training groups, concept-learing games which force a child to sit for long periods, are a thing of the past in our school. They have been replaced by self-initiating learning centers. The child moves from interest center to interest center, creating his own experiences and setting his own pace. These centers are changed frequently according to interests and needs. They are never arranged for ease of movement and convenience of use...but, rather, for maximum challenge of body and mind.

If a child wants to paint a picture, he first has to make his own paint, with water from the too-high-to-reach-easily sink. Sometimes he gets so involved in stirring the paint that he doesn't ever get around to using it. I have a suspicion that this child somehow senses his need for this particular type of perceptual-motor-visual experience, and thus satisfies himself.

If a child wants to use playdough, he gets the ingredients out and makes his own dough--inventing his recipe anew each time. And while so doing, he learns about texture, about measurements, about control of movements as he pours "a little more oil," about consistency...and, best of all, he learns about himself.

He is trusted to use the carpentry tools, which he does freely and deftly. He chooses collage materials sometimes from a lazy susan going round and round...sometimes from a divided egg carton or other box, and

sometimes from a massed collection of fifty separate plastic containers containing fifty different kinds of materials to be searched out with eyes and with fingers and with mind.

Concepts? He learns about more and less, hard and soft, far and near, big and little, from the work that he does, not from pictures and charts and words. And, he learns about words by the meaningful exchange of language with his friends as they discuss how to make a color thicker or how to pull a nail out that went in the wrong way...or how to plan an activity...or how to clean up a mess.

And what of the graduates of this program? Although they represent a cross section of the community in which they live, 75% of them are usually selected by their elementary schools for programs for the gifted, although we know in reality only a few of them are truly so.

The remaining 25% are all among the early readers in their kindergartens, although we know, by experience, that some of them would not have quite made it into the first grade without difficulty had they started out with a lesser program than ours.

WHAT MOVES ME TO ACT?

I think of the vast system of public and private education in this nation and its accompanying resources.

I think of the community in which I work and live.

I think of the last school board meeting which I attended which discussed housing and bussing and teachers and money and accountability, BUT NEVER ONCE MENTIONED CHILDREN!

I think of the children I know and of their common and predictable patterns of development.

I think of their uncommon personalities and of their differences... their skills...their needs....

And I also think of their feelings and their emotions which <u>are the very same</u> as the feelings I experience and the emotions I have...and, do you know? They are exactly the same as the feelings <u>you</u> experience and the feelings <u>you</u> have.

I agree with Dr. Ayres' statement that we need to get out of the over-dependence for our actions on the laboratory results and the methodologists. Yes, let's get on with the business of what <u>really</u> happens with humans!

TO LOVE A CHILD...AND, IN LOVING, TO HELP HIM DEVELOP HIS FULL POTENTIAL.

TO BEFRIEND ANOTHER PERSON, AND IN FRIENDSHIP, TO HELP HIM TOWARD THE KIND OF LIFE THAT WILL BE BOTH WHOLESOME AND SELF-REWARDING. THESE, THEN, ARE THE THINGS WHICH MOVE ME TO ACT.

I HOPE THEY WILL MOVE YOU AS WELL.